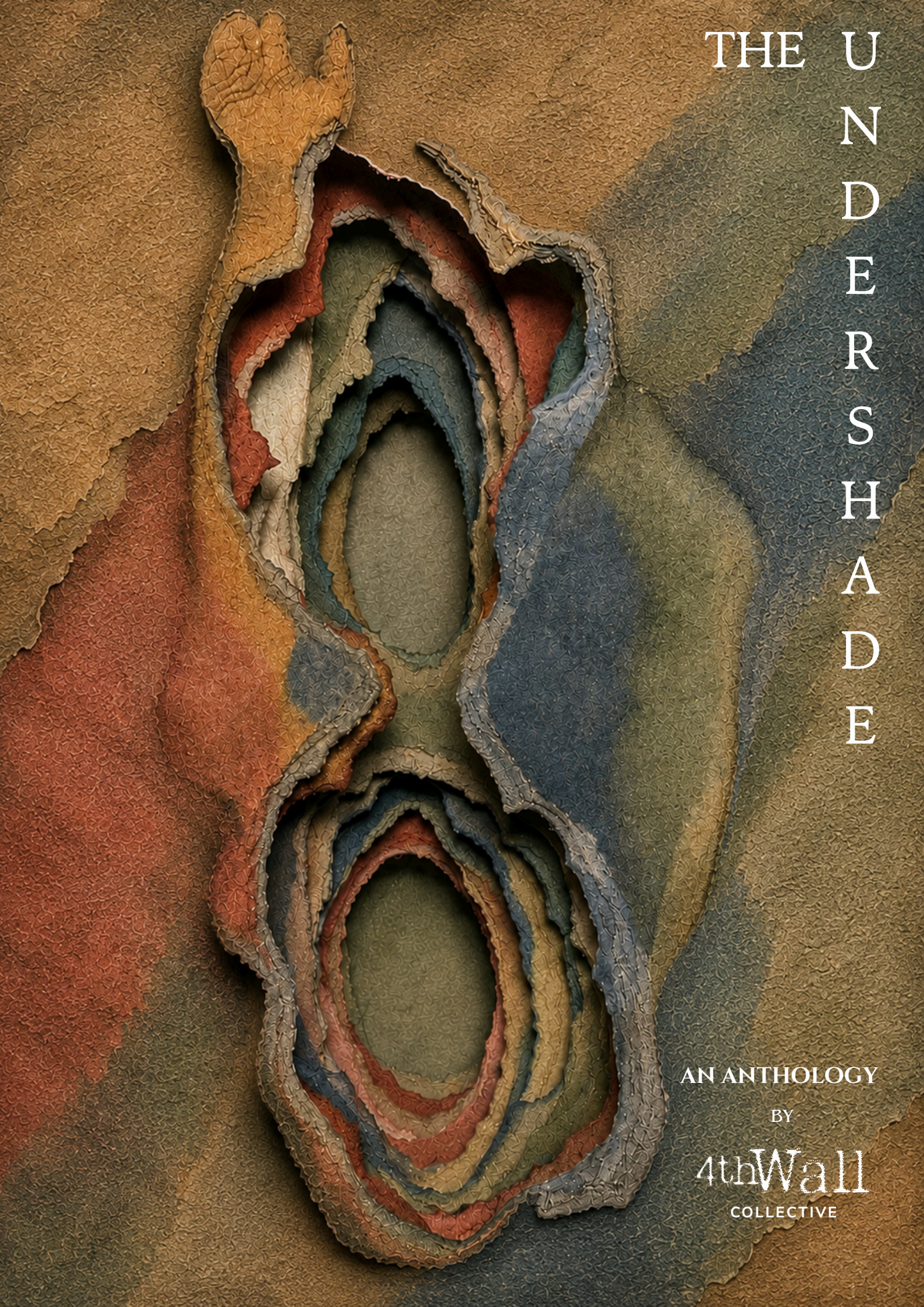

THE UNDERSHADE
AN ANTHOLOGY
BY
4thWall
COLLECTIVE

# *Praise for*
# The Undershade

*"The Undershade is a bold and imaginative anthology that showcases writers willing to experiment with language, form, and narrative. Though diverse in style and subject matter, the stories are united by concerns with identity, memory, exclusion, belonging, and transformation. Together they demonstrate the richness of contemporary South African storytelling and offer a compelling exploration of the spaces between reality and imagination, past and present, self and society.*"

**Dr Janet Van Eeden**, Postgraduate POC & QCO, AFDA Durban

*"The Undershade is a powerful debut into one of literature's most formidable scenes: the South African short story. Four young voices have gathered to whistle the hurt and beauty of a country's generation. Each offering is a distinct note that shatters our collective fourth wall, and pokes elegantly into the malice our history has too far denied. This anthology is an audacity that is unreserved and, quite frankly, overdue."*

**S'fundo Sosibo,** Research Studies Lecturer, AFDA Durban

# The Undershade

## An Anthology

by

4thWallCollective

**The Undershade**
**Copyright © 2026 4thWallCollective**.

All rights reserved. Individual stories remain the copyright of their respective authors. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or any electronic or mechanical method, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

The characters and events in this anthology are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is entirely coincidental.

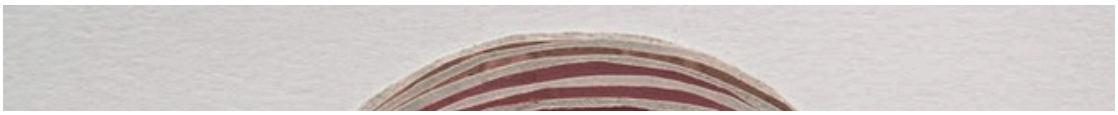
The moral rights of the authors have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright Act 98 of 1978 (South Africa).

For permissions requests, contact: the.4thwallcollective@gmail.com
Visit website at: https://4thwallcollective.neocities.org

Cover design by Savannah-Lee Jacobs
Interior design and layout by Hannah Q.I. Ballaram

Printed in South Africa

# TABLE OF CONTENTS




PREFACE

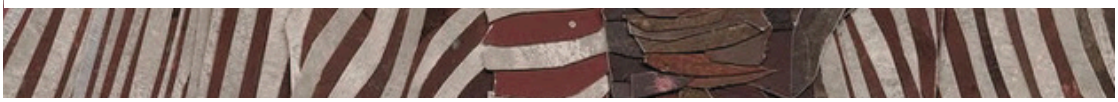
01 *Mandulo* 1-12

02 Phantasmagoria 14-26

03 AFTER HOURS 28-41

04 Soft Backs where Wolves Once Stood 44-54

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



ABOUT 4THWALL

# PREFACE

*A writers directive is to reveal what you or the other may see, feel, and know.*

The Undershade began and remains a steadfast endeavour to share what we know and feel. In truth, South African youth are disillusioned with their past, present, and future in ways we can barely articulate. The Undershade seeks to honour and give shape to the grief, confusion, anger, and fear of a generation reckoning with the struggles of belonging, remembrance, and identity.

These works contribute to realizing the space where most young South Africans are found—the eerie in-between. Where to go from here, what to do tomorrow or ten years from now… Who to be?

As the curator, I sought to ensure strangeness and uncertainty is felt, gradually unfurling in complex discussions of theme till the record shows a non-answer. Write your own ending, see your story clearly.

Read slowly. Feel deeply. And allow The Undershade to change you.

"Definitions belong to the definers, not the defined."

—Toni Morrison, *Beloved.*

*Who, then, is man to fancy himself the painter of my destiny?*

# *Mandulo*

Noeleen Nyoni

*They do not speak of the day she was born. Not loudly. Not freely.*
*But the trees remember.*
*And land itself remembers.*

The moon lingered in the dark sky, the air had weight on the night. Even the animals had fallen silent, as though something had pressed a hand over the mouth of the world and inside the royal hut uNdlonkulu Nomalanga laid on the grass mat, skin sheening while she fidgeted with isfociya, a waistband women wore to protect their babies. The fire in the centre of the hut burned low, smoke clinging to the thatch instead of rising. Inkosi uBusa paced the small space like a man waiting for news of war, not a child. His shadow moved before him, restless, broken by flame. UNdlonkulu Nomalanga laboured through each contraction, pulling a sound from her she did not recognise as her own. Outside, the cattle shifted and pressed against their enclosure. The trees did not sway. They leaned, listening. When the child came, she did not cry. As uNdlonkulu Nomalanga reached slowly toward the baby, Inkosi uBusa froze in shock. He looked at the child then at his wife.

The queen waited for it, the sharp protest of life. The fire flicked violently. For a moment there was only breathing, the baby opened her eyes. Blue. Green. Like deep water holding light. The pale skin. The golden hair damp against her small skull. The eyes that did not blink. Something hardened in the king so quickly that he spat on the floor.

“Isishawa esgodlweni soSiba?!”

UNdlonkulu Nomalanga flinched and held the baby. Inkosi uBusa stepped back as if distance could undo what had been born.

“Fihla lento.” Thunder cracked so near the hut trembled. UNdlonkulu Nomalanga wrapped the baby tighter. The kings jaw tightened.

“Amasende ami angilahlile ngiyafunga kwamathongo. Angeke ngikhulise isishawa, umthakathi esgodlweni sikababa. ”

The queen’s grip tightened. A tear escaped from her. Outside, wind moved suddenly through the trees, sweeping a circle as if drawing a boundary. The king’s voice sharpened.

“Akumele abonwe ngisho nayisilwane lesi. Ubukhona bakhe bungaletha ichilo esgodlweni. Abantu bona bangangibona nje nge nkosi enjani? Lezizinto zodalelwe ukubulawa.”

The queen looked down at the baby. The child stared back at her, silent, almost watchful. The king’s eyes darkened.

“Lingaphumi ilanga lento isakulama gceke wobabomkhulu. ”

The words entered her like cold water. She pulled the royal cloth from the corner: thick cowhide. She wrapped her daughter in it, hands shaking. Folded it carefully, not too tight. The child barely moved. Her tears dripped onto the fur. She wiped her face.

“Akugcine,” she whispered.

“Akufihle.”

She lit a lamp. Placed her baby in a basket and picked it up. Turned to leave. But at the door… she stopped and looked back at the room. Where she nursed. Where she bled. Where she dreamt. One last tear fell. Then she shut the door behind her, taking to the night quietly and secretly. Her lamp flickered with each movement. She reached the edge of the forest, and her voice broke the silence, cracked and low:

*“Oh nami angazi, angazi...*
*Angazi noma kyomlungela...*
*Iwe mathongo ami, angazi…*
*Iyoh... angazi…”*

She sang while she walked, while she cried silently, she sang with her heart. Each note was a plea. Each word a wound. The trees didn’t answer. The wind didn’t move. But they were listening. So did fate. Mist clung low across the water, and the banks were soft and pliant. The smell of wet earth and wild reeds hung in the air. She stood at the edge for a long time. Just listening. Watching. She took one last glance at her daughter, placed the basket in the water and she whispered,

“UnguMandulo ka Sibanyoni. “

She pushed the basket to flow in the water. High above, the moon slipped behind cloud. And when she had taken only a few steps, a deep crack echoed through the darkness.

Through eighty seasons and twenty years, the forest had kept Mandulo hidden beneath its breath. But the second moon was nearing now…ukwandulelwa. Morning entered the forest gently. First came the birds. Their songs drifted through the trees before the sunlight did, sharp whistles and soft chirping echoing across the damp earth and Mandulo’s eyes shot open. For a moment, only a smile slowly spread across her face. Sunlight slipped through the cracks of her small hut in long golden streaks. Dust floated inside the light like tiny spirits dancing in the air. Mandulo sat up quickly. Her golden curls were wild from sleep. She grabbed her woven basket from the corner of the hut and hurried outside barefoot. The morning air kissed her skin. She laughed softly to herself and broke into a playful run.

Grass brushed against her legs as she moved between the trees with ease, hopping over roots and ducking beneath low branches like she had done a thousand times before. Her eyes wandered everywhere curiously. A butterfly passed her and she instantly chased after it, laughing when it disappeared higher into the trees. A small bird suddenly landed on her shoulder and she froze. Slowly, she turned her head toward it. The tiny bird stared back at her boldly, its chest puffing proudly and it released a tsweee sound.

“Prrrrrr.” Mandulo released a sound too. “tsee tsee.” A bright giggle escaped her and bird poked Mandulo’s arm and fluttered away and Mandulo immediately followed after it through the forest, laughing loudly now as it jumped from branch to branch ahead of her. She reached the river breathless and took a deep breath while smiling. She dropped her basket carelessly onto the grass and rushed forward. The water was cold beneath her fingertips. She dipped both hands into the river and splashed water onto her face. Tiny droplets clung to her pale skin and golden eyelashes. She stepped deeper into the river until the water wrapped around her knees. Fish darted away beneath her feet. Mandulo lunged after them playfully and nearly slipped. Another burst of laughter escaped her. She spun through the shallow water, splashing wildly while her laughter echoed through the trees. The forest answered her with life as usual. Birds scattered upward from nearby branches. Monkeys barked noisily somewhere above her. Insects buzzed in the reeds. At the opposite side of the river, a deer stepped carefully from the trees.

Mandulo immediately became still. Water dripped quietly from her arms. The deer watched her without fear. Mandulo lowered herself slowly into the water until only her shoulders remained above the surface. A curious smile rested on her face as she stared at the animal. Neither of them moved. Then the deer turned and disappeared back into the trees. Mandulo watched the space where it had stood for a long moment before finally leaning back into the river completely. Sunlight warmed her face. She floated in the river, head tilted, arms spread while she smiled taking in the sunlight. Her eyes remained oceanic, blue folding into green.

Then suddenly, silence.The birds stopped.

The monkeys stopped. Even the wind seemed to pull away from the trees. A deep crack echoed somewhere far within the forest. The river suddenly felt colder. Mandulo slowly sat up in the water. Her smile faded. She looked toward the trees, waiting for the birds to begin again. Nothing. A strange tightness crept into her chest. She stood slowly and stepped out of the river. Water slipped quietly down her legs as she reached for her basket. Mandulo clicked her tongue softly. No answer came. Her fingers tightened around the basket. Mandulo frowned slightly. She took a few careful steps forward. Then stopped. The deer. It stood between the trees ahead. Its dark eyes remained fixed on her without blinking. Mandulo smiled uncertainly and took a small step toward it. The animal stared

at her one last time before disappearing silently into the forest. A strange feeling settled heavily inside her stomach. Then, clutching her basket tightly against herself, Mandulo hurried back through the trees toward her hut.

It was a random night when the air was thin and the insects quiet, an old voice came.

“Mandulo… Mandulo…”

Her eyes shot open. She rose and moved toward the river, grass brushing against her legs. Mist hung low over the water and across the river, a figure stood. An old woman, who beckoned with her hand. Mandulo lowered one foot into the water, nearly slipped but steadied herself against a stone.

“Wela ngapha.” The voice carried over the surface.

Mandulo looked up and the riverbank across from her was empty. No woman but only water rushing. Then the voice came again, this time echoing through the forest.

*“Akukho sihlahla esingenazo izimpande.*
*UnguMandulo ka Sibanyoni.”*

Mandulo froze, her ears buzzed, she clenched on to her ears, her body electrified and felt heavy. The world tilted, and suddenly she was no longer alone at the river. She stood at its edge, watching. UNdlonkulu Nomalanga stood where she now stands. Younger. Trembling. Holding a basket. Mandulo couldn’t move. Couldn’t speak. She watched her mother kneel. Watched her place the basket into the water and she heard the whisper again,

“UnguMandulo ka Sibanyoni.”

The words echoed louder this time, ringing through the air until her ears burnt. And then, a *crack!* Wood straining somewhere in the forest. The same sound. The same fracture. Mandulo’s eyes snapped open. She was lying at the riverbank in the exact place her mother once knelt. Her body was soaked and her hair clung to her skin. Her chest rose sharply as if she had surfaced from underwater. The cold in her bones was real and that is what unsettled her most. She moved backwards in the mud, while she shook her head. Her eyes bulged as her heart leapt in her chest.

Days passed and Mandulo avoided the river by all means. She would feel thirsty but she would think of that woman who left the baby in the river. The river started to change colour to a darker shade. The grass along its banks yellowed unevenly. Small plants folded inward before their time. Near the bend stood a Betula tree, tall, pale-barked, its skin almost white against the dark forest. A thin crack deepened along its trunk. The crack

deepened. Mandulo stepped forward and pressed her palm against the pale bark.The tearing stopped instantly. The split sealed beneath her hand. The bark smoothed. She pulled back, breath uneven. Her face shifted, confusion first and then disbelief.

Her shoulder leaned lightly against the Betula. Her skin mirrored its bark, pale against pale. Moss creeped up her arm. Her outline softened slowly until she was no longer fully separate from the tree. Mandulo jerked away immediately. She frowned and darted her eyes around the forest. Her body instantly became heavy and she clicked her tongue. She looked down at her hand and shook it violently as if trying to force the feeling out of her skin. When she looked at the tree again with her jaw dropped.

Slowly, cautiously, she touched the bark once more. Again, her skin blended into it. The pale of her arm disappeared against the trunk. Mandulo yanked her hand back instantly. She glared at her arm. Then bit down hard against her own hand. Pain shot through her skin. She groaned, tightening her jaw and she kicked the ground violently, breathing sharply now as panic and frustration rose inside her chest. Dirt splashed across her skin. Then she clicked her tongue again and stumbled backwards while her shoulder slammed against the Betula. Instantly, darkness closed around her. She stood inside a hollow shaped by living wood. Roots curved upward like ribs. Bark arched above her like a cage. The air smelled damp. Across from her stood the old woman. Clearer now. In her hand burned a candle. Its flame flickered sharply, almost dying before steadying itself again. Around her feet, honey fungus spread in glowing clusters, pushing through the roots beneath her. The old woman looked directly at Mandulo.

“Kungani unovalo kangaka mntanomntami?” she gave a warm smile.

Mandulo immediately stepped backwards. Her shoulders struck the curved bark behind her. The buzzing had already begun again. Soft at first, then sharper. Mandulo quickly covered her ears. Her breathing became uneven. A broken sound tried to form in her throat but collapsed into breath.

“Impande enqatshiwe ibolisa sonke isihlahla.”

Mandulo squeezed her eyes shut instantly. She slid down against the bark and pulled her knees tightly against her chest, rocking herself desperately while pressing harder against her ears. The buzzing deepened.

“Asikho isikhathi esingafiki. Nesakho sesiyafika kodwa kuzomele uzithole futhi uqondisise ukuthi ungubani.”

Mandulo let out a strained cry. The candle flickered again.

“Ungu Mandulo ka Sibanyoni…”

Mandulo screamed. The buzzing exploded through her skull. She pressed her palms harder against her ears until her nails dug painfully into her skin.

Light returned. Warm, late afternoon and Mandulo stood beneath the shade of a tree. Beside her sat a heavily pregnant woman, uNdlonkulu Nomalanga. She did not see Mandulo. She rubbed her stomach slowly, humming, low, steady. A melody old and familiar. Her fingers rested on an old guitar, worn wood, scarred by time. The oldest kind. She hummed softly.

*“Waphephela enqabeni wena kaSiba!*
*Naziya! Naziya!*
*Izintandane zobaba. Naziya!”*

Mandulo watched her, the tenderness, the hope, the quiet pride. The melody was gentle, then, the guitar string snapped sharp and violent. The light shifted and suddenly she was no longer outside. She stood inside the royal hut. Then she heard only the echo of the melody, humming somewhere distant. UNdlonkulu Nomalanga held a pale baby. Golden hair damp against a small skull. Ngwekazi’s breath tightened and she looked at the baby, then at her own hands. The same skin and the same eyes. She looked at Nomalanga’s skin caramel but very strong. She looked at Inkosi uBusa’s skin, dark, unyielding. The difference stood between them like a blade.

“Fihla lento.”

“Amasende ami angilahlile ngiyafunga kwamathongo. Angeke ngikhulise isishawa, umthakathi esgodlweni sikababa.” He spat on the floor.

“Lingaphumi ilanga lento isakulama gceke wobabomkhulu.” The words fell heavy and Mandulo did not move. She watched her mother’s arms tighten around the child. The humming continued faint and fractured. Mandulo looked at the baby again. At herself. At the space where rejection began. The hut faded. The thunder dissolved. The humming disappeard. Ngwekazi stood alone again beneath the trees. The forest returned but she did not move at first. She touched her arm, shoulder, and face with hands pale against the dark soil, seeing herself for the first time not as beauty or light, but as reason. Understanding at last that she was the child once hidden in her mother’s arms and cast into the river for her skin and difference. She kneeled at the riverbank, dug into the wet earth, covered herself in mud, across her arms, neck, face until the pale was gone and she finally resembled the soil that never rejected her. She stopped in the silence and let out a painful, loud cry.

The Betula tree groaned and a sharp strain tore through the trunk. At the same moment, leaves broke loose above her and scattered around her feet and she was too consumed

trying to survive the knowledge that she was not lost but left. The shame burned hotter than understanding. Then the sky broke heavily and crashed down with rain. Water struck her skin hard and the mud began dissolving instantly with brown streaks running down her arms, neck and chest. The earth she used to hide herself washed her clean without asking. Mandulo cried harder. Her body folded into itself while grief tore through her soundlessly. The pain made no sense and it felt older than her, like mourning something she had never touched.

The storm did not soften for a long time. By the time the rain weakened, Mandulo could barely keep herself upright. Her chest ached. Her eyes burnt and even breathing felt heavy now. She retreated slowly toward her small hut. No fire tonight. No fruit gathering. No laughter. She just collapsed onto the woven grass mat inside while her wet curls clinging against her skin. Mandulo closed her eyes for a moment and then her body felt suddenly weightless. The cold wind touched her skin and her eyes opened. She was standing again but not inside her hut. The full moon hung enormous above her, silver and swollen against the dark sky and mist drifted across the ground. Then a voice called through the night.

“Woza ngapha.”

Mandulo froze instantly. The old woman stood ahead again. Mandulo felt goosebumps and shivers down her spine. Her stomach burnt and she held her stomach while she stepped backwards. The old woman turned and moved forward without waiting.

“Woza.”

Mandulo shook her head quickly but her feet moved anyway. She followed reluctantly through the mist while the woman drifted ahead of her. Every time Mandulo tried to get closer, the old woman vanished, then reappeared further ahead until finally they stood at the top of a hill. Mandulo’s breathing slowed.

Below her stretched a world she did not recognize. Dead cattle laid stiff across the fields. Mandulo staggered backwards slightly. Burnt crops spread black and hollow across the earth. Huts stood swallowed by thick roots twisting through walls and rooftops as though the land itself had reclaimed them. The river below ran thin and dark. The palace stood broken in the distance and walls split open, roofs collapsed inward. A cold wind passed through Mandulo’s body and then she saw her, uNdlonkulu Nomalanga standing among the ruins lifting an old horn and blowing it. The sound carried long and mournful across the valley while she sang softly.

*“Wena kaNdaba…*
*Wena ungowamakhosi…*
*Abasendulo…”*

Drums echoed somewhere beyond the hills and lightning fractured the sky. Mandulo’s eyes widened as she stared below her. The old woman stepped beside her with udondolo, an ancient wood. Mandulo immediately stepped away from it. The old woman grabbed her wrist firmly and Mandulo struggled instinctively, panic flashing across her face but the woman pressed the stick into her palm anyway. The moment it touched her skin, cold rushed violently through her body, the hairs of her skin shot up and gasped sharply. The moonlight brightened around them. It was finally the second moon, uMandulo. Ukwandulelwa kwenkosazane uMandulo, izimpande ezigqitshiwe ziyakuqhasha ngaphansi komhlabathi ngoba akukho sihlahla esingenazo izimpande.

“Emva kweminyaka engamashumi amabili,” the old woman said softly, “unyezi lusaxoxa indaba yakho nanamuhla.”She chuckled quietly.

“Sekuyisikhathi sokuthi uzazi ukuthi ungubani.”

Mandulo frowned and squinted her eyes at the destruction below. The old woman turned toward her slowly.

“Akukho sihlahla esingenazo izimpande.” Then she finally asked:

“Wena ungubani?” Mandulo backed away and her throat pulled tight.

Darkness swallowed everything. The old woman vanished. Mandulo’s eyes snapped open. She was kneeling outside her hut. Rainwater soaked the ground beneath her and udondolo remained clutched tightly in her hand and it was real. Mandulo stared at it in horror then suddenly, cold spread through her skin. She dropped the stick instantly and grabbed her left arm. Dark green veins spread beneath her skin like roots beneath thin soil. Mandulo cried out soundlessly and clawed at her arm in panic. The veins crawled higher across her shoulder, collarbone, neck while branching across her face in patterns shaped like the limbs of an iroko tree. Her breathing became frantic and started scratching herself all over her body while tears ran down her face. She stumbled backwards against her hut and outside lightning flashed through the forest. Honey fungus spread thickly across the ground around the trees, glowing amber beneath the rain. Roots pushed upward through the earth, curling around her hut like living fingers. Mandulo shook violently. Rainwater ran down her face while the green veins continued spreading beneath her skin like living roots. She scratched until her skin reddened but it made no difference.

Amber clusters pushed through the wet earth faster now, swallowing roots, stones, fallen branches. Mandulo backed away in panic. Then suddenly, a sharp cry split through the for and Mandulo raised udondolo and thunder cracked. She dropped the wooden stick and covered her mouth and another cry followed. It was an animal in pain and she turned quickly picking up udondolo again. Just beyond the trees, a small buck stumbled violently through the rain. Its legs shook beneath it, dark fungus climbed one side of its neck and Mandulo rushed toward it instinctively. She dropped beside it quickly, hands trembling while she scratched her hair while shaking her hands in the air in panic. The moment her palm touched the animal's neck, the green beneath its skin retreated. The fungus loosened. The buck jerked sharply beneath her touch, gasping and Mandulo stared in shock, but then, the veins beneath her own arm darkened deeper. The buck staggered weakly back onto its feet now alive and Mandulo looked between the animal and her own arm frantically. The buck stared at her then slowly, it backed away from her returning to the forest. Mandulo remained kneeling in the mud and lightning flashed across the trees and suddenly she understood something terrifying. The forest was not attacking her. The forest was dying with her and another crack echoed through the trees. Roots burst through the ground near her hut and honey fungus spread wider and faster. Mandulo looked around wildly. Everywhere she looked, decay followed and the river darkened while trees strained too. Life weakened before her eyes and somehow, it all moved with her. Tears mixed with rainwater on her face and a broken sound collapsed in her throat. Her eyes fell toward udondolo lying in the mud nearby and rain struck its surface heavily. The old woman’s voice echoed faintly inside her head.

“Wena ungubani?”

Mandulo huffed, feeling frustrated. Fear and pain still lived inside her but something else stood beside it now. If she stayed here, the forest would die with her. Mandulo slowly picked up udondolo. The moment her fingers wrapped around it, the roots nearest to her loosened slightly, responding and Mandulo stared at them. Lightning flashed again. Mandulo closed her eyes tightly. Then finally, she stepped forward not because she was fearless but there was no longer anywhere left to hide. Lightning revealed the forest in flashes again. When she reached the river, the water was dark, tinted red with silt churned from its bed. Along the banks, honey fungus gripped the roots of trees leaning into the current. She stepped into the water. Instantly, the river cleared around her. The water mirrored her skin, reflecting pale and green. When she stepped back out, the water changed from clear to red again. She looked across. And this time she crossed. The moment her foot reached the opposite bank, the sky cracked loudly and she flinched. A light drizzle began and she walked through the night. The drizzle followed her down the hill and the land changed as she moved. By the time she reached the outskirts of the homestead, the palace was not asleep. Old lamps burnt outside the gates and voices were raised in frustration. Men and women stood in clusters, their faces drawn, their

clothing dusted with ash and soil, their cattle dead, their fields burnt, their wells thinned and they had come for answers. They had come for the king. Inkosi uBusa stood at the entrance, guarded but unsettled and uNdlonkulu Nomalanga stood slightly behind him, her face older now, carved by years. Lightning revealed the crowd in flashes. And then, someone saw her. At first only a shape beyond the gate. Then the pale of her skin caught lamp light.

“Isishawa…” one shouted.

Another voice joined in. “Isishawa…” The word traveled quickly. Inkosi uBusa looked up. His eyes found her. For a moment, the air left his body and he frowned while uNdlonkulu Nomalanga’s hand gripped her chest. Lightning split across the sky as Mandulo stepped through the palace gates. Rain crashed down instantly. The crowd stumbled backwards in panic as thunder erupted above the palace. Roots crawling along the walls began loosening rapidly, peeling away from the stone like hands releasing a throat. Honey fungus shriveled into the mud. The ground trembled beneath everyone’s feet. Mandulo stood frozen in the center of the courtyard, soaked beneath the storm.Then she saw her. UNdlonkulu Nomalanga. For a moment, nothing else existed. Not the crowd. Not the king. Not the fear. Only her. Slowly, she stepped forward. UNdlonkulu Nomalanga moved too. The closer they came, the harder the rain fell. Mandulo stopped directly before her mother. Up close now, she could see the years. The grief. The guilt. UNdlonkulu Nomalanga lifted a trembling hand toward Mandulo’s face but hesitated halfway. Mandulo closed the distance herself. She took her mother’s hand gently and pressed it fully against her cheek. Warm. Real. UNdlonkulu Nomalanga’s face crumpled instantly. A broken sound escaped her. Mandulo touched her mother carefully like someone learning a forgotten language. Her forehead. Her cheeks. Her shoulders. Her arms. Slow. Disbelieving. As if confirming she truly existed. Then suddenly uNdlonkulu Nomalanga pulled her into her arms. Mandulo froze at first. Then broke completely. Her body collapsed against her mother while silent sobs tore through her chest. Thunder exploded above them. Wind spiraled violently through the courtyard. The rain poured harder. And around them, the roots released fully from the palace walls. Villagers gasped loudly. Some dropped to their knees immediately. Others bowed their heads in fear. The storm itself seemed to move with them. UNdlonkulu Nomalanga pulled back just enough to hold Mandulo’s face between her hands. Tears streamed down both of them. Then, with a shaking voice that carried across the courtyard, she declared:

“Umntanami lo.” Thunder cracked violently. She looked directly at the crowd.

“Lona ngu- Mandulo ka Sibanyoni.”

“Mkhipheni!” The crowd jolted and uNdlonkulu Nomalanga turned sharply toward him. Inkosi uBusa pointed at Mandulo with a shaking hand, fury and fear twisting together inside his voice.

“Anginangane eyisishawa. Emhlophe kanje!”

The rain weakened suddenly. Thunder cracked and the earth shook slightly. Everyone heard it, felt it and the roots along the palace walls slowly tightened again. Inkosi uBusa saw it too and his expression faltered for the first time. Then an old woman from the crowd stepped forward slowly and her eyes shot straight at the king.

“Kwagcina nini ukuna?” The woman asked and Inkosi uBusa said nothing.

“Izinkomo zethu, amasimi. Kungani inkosi izicabangela yona yodwa?” Inkosi uBusa’s jaw hardened. The old woman looked toward Mandulo.

“Akubuswa ngemizwa kepha kubuswa ngobuhlakani nangokwamkela. Ukuphila kwalomhlaba kumi kulowamntwana” she pointed at Mandulo with her forehead and her voice sharpened.

“Kepha ukufa kwalomhlaba kusezandleni zakho. Bheka isihlathi sakhe. ” He frowned and took a step towards Mandulo. He scanned her face and his eyes lit while he reached for Mandulo. Mandulo maintained eye contact with him with tears blurring her eyes.

“Isihlahla sabadala.” He pointed at the iroko tree. “Uphawu lolu lokuthi ungokhethiweyo. Uphawu lako Sibanyoni.”

“Bayede…” he whispered shakily. An elder bowed. Then a loud crack of thunder erupted loudly again and the stars formed a pattern of an iroko tree. Everyone looked up and said,

“Uyingonyama.”

***For what the world rejected, the earth had chosen long ago. Akukho sihlahla esingenazo izimpande.***

*I was never undecided, here—I was just unwell.*

# PHANTASMAGORIA

Savannah-Lee Jacobs

A breath of air summons me.
The red light is singing.
And the white ones are counting.
Day. Night.
Light.
Again.
It is grey here, and it hurts.
Euphoric emanation.
Commonwealth.
I have been wearing the South all day.
The flag of The Archive God.
I am just a number.
It is Holy in here, and it hurts.
I wish to belong to the wind.
So, my feet stay loose.
On the land of a broke-n-healing country.

Deciding whether I am worth the electricity. They ask me to pick a future before I could name my ache.

"We are living in the aftertaste of a failing promise, you are the change," My mother yelled out the window before driving away.

I grip my duffel, and my clothes hug me back. The walls are ice white today. The smell of old rubber and the twang of floor chemicals cover a taste in my mouth—like matte plasters sticking to my tongue. There were head-bowed figures sat in swivel chairs, with dots waiting on thumbs. Each of their bottoms moving to the next seat in unison. A formal order drumming against my chest as they create a beat. Their heads fold close-chested against oversized blouses and slime sweat beads roll down the side of their faces. Eyes pivot to every corner in the room like blind bats. There are voting boxes placed aimlessly. Empty boxes we still feed, not with votes but with evidence and bias.

A lady standing in a silk ceremonial gown counts little yellow tickets and lifts her head to me. Without the force of my guardians, I am here.
My lips part as I was about to ask for direction, but the quickness of her wrapped around me as she taped a wired mic to my ironed collar. I remember the day my grandfather left this suit behind. It could not dare touch the same soil he rests in.

That was when I notice a side door awaiting like a mouth, framing my parallel world. I move closer to my assumed chair. A laminated card pinned above the stool, had more politesse than any worker here.
"Sit!" I read. A zepto-second split the air when the Counting Lady, now in a hazmat suit—draws a permanent dot on my thumb.
"Don't be afraid 001, in the age of information, the choice is yours," the Counting Lady grits through the mask. A young man parked on my lap, stood up, and sat again.
I worm my body out under him and flinch onto my feet thinking I am next to move, but my armchair corrects its position. Waiting here was timed, I figure.

A flattening human voice oozes out the modern intercoms;

"Dear Broken ones. This is the evolutionary fixing project. It is expected of you to watch the experience of those who are just as broken. As a parenting agent. This session is recorded for the protection of our listeners and the creators of this experiment. For our Nation. Welcome to the Archive…"

The intercom fizz disappears and there is frost and mist caught in the fluorescence. Democracy. The fridge that is always on, but never working. I rub the invisible jacket of goosebumps off my elbows as I halt before the door. A friend of friction itches my skin. The Counting Lady lifts her head once again, refusing to break eye-contact with me. She has not blinked in years.

It is poor in here, and it hurts.

My eyes twinkle around the red blinking light above the door.
A label 'Therapy A' I read, then a camera flash.
Spiking the lens—I wonder, can they sense my lack of breath?
I was never undecided, here—I was just unwell.
While my buried self seeps through—they can never meet me inside.

Allowing time to belong and be, I turn to look at a figure sitting near. Hands gripping a video console. I notice de-attached eyes hypnotized by a blinking timestamp.

At first, 'The Boy'
Then.
"Archive: 001"
"Archive: 001"
"Archive: 001"

I hear my name again.
I lean towards the screen and it brightens. On it, I am smaller. Safer. I look at the camera and then back at the console—a delay of half a second between us.
I watch myself watching myself again.
"ARCHIVE 001:" blinks in red. *My name.*
I took a step closer and the glass washes clear.
With no resistance, my body feels lighter and then thinner.
I do not fall but it absorbs me.
The timestamp stops blinking and the red light above the door burns still.
This is no longer a film, this is now.

My hand hugs the handle. Cold, sharp metal. I taste the spice of iron and coins chipping at my teeth. My world pauses before me and my blood settles quietly.

"No!" the row of citizens shout in harmony. They pause a second to sing a line to me,
"Every. Good. Citizen. Adds. To. The. Strength. Of. A Nation!"
The intercom tunes in, "Good, again!"

My spine shivers and the bile warms.
*If I choose to open this door, I will die alive and well.*
*If I choose a box, I will just die.*

The metal handle grills my hand and the chant from my fellow neighbours fade as the shield of my spirit steps before me. I hesitate for a moment **to think**.

*If the door opened*, the room would smell of black pepper oud and a hint of burnt lavender. A labyrinth of shelves and dust. If I searched for morality there, it would be of humane surplus. Spearing my vision up the unbounded walls—laddering books stretch burgundy and mustard spines. There would be roots growing from in between the egotistical theorists.
Those robbed of all nobles.
And there, it would be quiet.

Walking into the bottomless space, I would sweep my feet through slush. A tapestry of clocks ticking backwards came down the walls. Some frozen, some lost. It would be better to have no sense of day—for that reason you have an excuse to not depict when time slid off the bone. The question is, whether it was spent irresponsibly or valuably.

And then,

The corner mirror would reflect a scene. A tall figure stood there, slim. Coated in a black suit, cut sharp and quilted. Cupped in his palm, a bag shaped like a book. Same as mine. Minimizing the standard of high fashion. Shoes that pointed sharp at both ends. I looked at the mirror figure and his frail sheer fringe, matching the pigment of his cheek freckles. He tilted his head whenever I did. Fidgeted his thumb the same and has a similar barren look to his eyes.

I asked him, "What is in your bag?"
*What is in your bag? he asked me.*
"A lot of things," I told him.
*A lot of things? he asked.*
"Yes," I answered.

The door would unseal and let a man saunter in. A man with beautiful skin. Skin that held the ancient earth. Elbows that hummed clay and coffee, enough to sculpt worlds. My tongue only clicked at the beauty of humanity, never the flesh.

"I'm Dr. Kaya," the man said.

A dead face speaking.
He moved around the room like it was his own craft. He sat down in the armchair, pointed at the adjacent couch. Carved the gesture like a blade into wood.
Dr. Kaya unpinned his blazer at the swell of his tummy and let comfort creep through his bones—patient and inevitable as fog. He adjusted the small recording mic on his collar.
Still standing beside him, I would feel his pulse match mine. The glow of his entity could not light up the room, it just burned up my cheeks. A bitter velvet rose up my chest and turned sour.

“Are you ready?” he asked.

My body stayed still—quiet like an owl on a branch. Each existing word felt like a stone in my mouth, too big to fall out or swallow back.
Clunk.
I heard a thud. Not outside, not in the room. In me. I could answer him, but I didn't.
I left the verbal ecosphere.
*Now two dead faces in a room.*

“I have a list” Dr. Kaya said.
“Explain these to me, how they make you feel, however you will,” He coughed into his fist.
The Boy said nothing.

"You brought it with you," he hummed.

The Boy looked down. He held the bag too tightly—like something might escape. The bag jolted and left an ill hum and sway.

**Dr. Kaya said, “Awe”**

The Boy gulped. As the words in his consciousness could not find a mate. A unified explanation settled with the unknown parable. The bag was now open and he stared at it. *If only we were strainers*, he thought. We could drain out to the bottom and let the ground understand us. Seep back to our mother soil. Instead, his left thumb and right thumb were in the corners of his mouth and his index fingers rested above each cheek. He pulled both near and sculpted his face into a fixed mask. Before reaching in the bag—he submitted to the yearn of his memories.
The Boy darted his eyes at Dr. Kaya who waited. A performer now reached into the bag and pulled out two saucers. *Those of fine China.*
He rubbed his fingers over the printed pattern—a rough lined porcelain artefact.

A creature blurred his gaze and showed him the old times. The possessor of shaped thoughts. It did not have arms, but it carried all his years at once. The creature was liquid, fluid, distant and had a tint of static film. He remembered the sun-warmed carpet pressed against his cheek and the colour of a Persian rug under his nail.
At that moment it belonged to a different world. The creature showed him a revelation of himself in foresight. A time where he was more significant.
When he was still a baby son.

The room breathed around him, forcing the entirety to feel small. A thousand silent voices hummed a name he suddenly knew was his. The creature showed him his home in a crystal glass case and shoved his guardians in his face. He remembered now—the colour of his mother’s eyes and the hair he cloned from his father.
He remembered seeing them hover as they looked at him. For the first time in a long time, he remembered how beautiful it was to study the spawn.

He traced a figure of eight on the back of the saucer, a shape of natural motion. Then he lifted one saucer to his right eye, pulled down his lower lid to hug the rim beneath it, and drew his upper lid over the edge of the plate.

Silence filled the room.
A line of red carved around and dripped past his cheek.
The existence of memories—it was remembering the day of birth.
To him, that was awe.

Blood pooled in the crease of his suit pants.
Wine drooling down his white button-up.
They both looked down.

"It is red," The Boy whispered.
"She loved red."
"Who?" Dr. Kaya questioned.
"Mamma."
Dr. Kaya whispered into the mic, "Hallucination onset. Synthetic association. The Patient displays poetic reasoning tied to memory."

**Dr. Kaya said, "Contempt"**

The Boy ripped out the saucers and shattered them on the floor. The world uncurled from its distortion. Each furnishings are now doubled and cluttered the room. *Shambolic*. The rush of adrenaline claimed The Boy's veins and raised him up to a high. *Never believe in one—to understand the way of exploitation*, he thought to himself. The Boy picked at his bleeding thumb and replayed the note 'Contempt' in his mind. The Boy stared at the shards laying mosaic on the floor. He pointed and tipped his finger while counting the pieces.

"I have seven," The Boy said.
"Only seven?" Dr. Kaya asked.
"Is that not enough for you Doctor? Knowing they have less."
"Less what?" Dr. Kaya responded.
"Less awareness," The Boy spat.
"They don't need to know," Dr. Kaya defended himself.
"No," The Boy said.
"They don't deserve it."

He looked at the bag and noticed he had no item to display any 'disapproval'. Just for a moment he drifted out of time and disappeared like a ghost among the living—eyes wide with the weight of the unspoken. Like a fish in a net, caught by a stare. Dr. Kaya waited patiently. The Boy couldn't understand how uncomplaining he was.

*The humane complex was seen as a threat to harmony,* The Boy believed. That comfort was morally faint. Should the convolution of one be truth, and truth is depth —we are then lost. *Today's society is only fed to strive for comfort*, he reminded himself. Those who are unfit to understand what was simple, would be of inferior intellect. He would never pity these people, 'the soldiers protecting the sanctuary of simplicity'. To him, nothing was ever simple. The chaos made by the homes and decisions made by you, **yes you reading**—was the only known thing.

He scanned over the table and noticed a tissue box. Winded his face into his clownish mask once again. In his palm, he ripped the corner off. Wetted the cardboard point with his gloss tongue and blew air.
One blow, two blows expanded it past his nose like a balloon.

*I am the last bastion of authentic complexity*, he evoked. *I never wanted to dehumanize those that are simplified*, he promised himself. The outside rim of our own worlds, the public—**they** had a limitation on sentiments being expressed. Here, in this room it was cognized. It was that a parallel world existed for those who were meek and those who were multifarious, that simply was the truth of humanity.

"Mock comfort for nothing is ever enough for the humane," he grunted to himself.

The balloon was bigger now, pressed any movement into the fixed. He hated how easy it was for others. *How easy it could be for him*, he blamed. The balloon screeched against the wood, silk and stars. Caressed pressure upon the infinite. The box took the shape of a grown cow bull and stretched over Dr. Kaya's face. It sculpted horns and the ears of a devil above his head. This displayed the boast of those who are a part of the simple life. Something contempt haunted nowadays.

Dr. Kaya whispered into the mic while the carton tore against his cheek.
Gasped at air, "Subject displays cognitive elitism. Contempt, not as fulfilment but as emptiness."

POP!

**Dr. Kaya said, "Curiosity"**

The Boy peeled the balloon rubber from his mouth. He stretched it over his hands, and wondered how far an original form could expand itself. The balloon gum snapped at a weak seam.
"Interesting," he scoffed at himself.

Humane emotion is not a finite set, but an evolving language—like colour and math. The evolution of humanoids allowed us to name reactions over time. Time was meant for discovery. It was to be discussed that—maybe—emotions are used to embolden survival. But, what about those little pulses of feeling, that are laid snug in the in between?

Freedom was explained to him before he felt it.
The Boy reached into his bag for a seashell and placed it on his lap. He pulled his face back into the immovable front. The entertainer. Cased the conch shell over his left ear and listened to anxious footsteps that paced around. Someone that is waiting to be found within.
*Does he know he exists in a different world too?*

The Boy scratched his nose—tugged war with the moved furniture. Though this room was alive, it was wrong**. Just like the 21st century machine**. To shape new feelings

would never be beneficial for the chase of character quality nor the indication that you are alive, and well. The inability to name anything might be seen as a cryptic symbol of malfunction.

*A suspicion that you might be ahead of your time*, he said to **you.**
As he pondered that, *the holiest thing you could do is to feel something you have never felt before, to achieve the highest yonder?* **I am asking you**.
If only God finished writing the emotional code for humanity.
*Or were we meant to feel more?*

The Boy said, "Is that why they call it self-inductance of solenoid? To chase the impossible sound of something that might be there?"

He marvelled towards Dr. Kaya and succumbed to his knees before him. He held the seashell up to his ear and hoped he would listen too. *Even if the shell was empty.* Now both eyes-level, they stare at each other.

Dr. Kaya watched the soft glimmer in The Boy's eyes. Embers that refused to die—warm with the quiet hope of more. The Boy tapped his earlobe softly, shrugged his shoulders and nodded. A noticed yearn painted his face.
Dr. Kaya smiled gently, nodded his head faintly.

"I hear it too," he whispered.
The Boy stretched his mouth wider, left a smile behind as he moved back to his chair.
He's always been curious, is it just him that can feel this deeply?

"Do you also search room for room, for the place where freedom still slept?"
The Boy asked.
"No," Dr. Kaya said firmly.
"Why? Are you not curious?" The Boy fed back.
"It is not worth it!" Dr. Kaya said harshly.
"How?" The Boy pushed.
"I SAID NO! Do you not understand?" Dr. Kaya shouted at him.

Dr. Kaya whispered into the mic and stopped half-way.

"You know what?" Dr. Kaya spat.

He straightened his back against the chair and collected his emotion that bled the same as tree sap.

**Dr. Kaya said, "Fury"**

There was a ~~quiet~~ violence in literalism/ when one would be unable to express in language/ they were not just misunderstood / they were disallowed in the same reality as everyone else/ those became a part of the unintelligible / expression was a universal riddle for the ear of those who care to listen / communication is art/ we are/

us / not we / art.

Fury was when the confrontation of our "why" takes flame/ the canvas would then burn / the art would be on fire / we would melt / rather in separation / than together / then we clashed and then we fought / barricaded into each other / then we hated / Rage and fury was the burn from the implosion of one /

blank / blank / blank

**Dr. Kaya said, "Fury!"**

The Boy picked at his thumb and bounced his leg / he clenched his teeth against the boiling heat / the paint bubbled / There would be wind in the room / to give it life / a gust of echoes, sweeping words away of all things that made sense / it would be like this every time / the harder one tried avoid thinking about the flame / the more vivid it became / more present / the tickle on your nose turned itchy / waves became walls / and a cry a SCREAM!

Rage altered our view on reality/ what is clopped in the depth of honour/ it was never passive / it would be forceful / The Boy's silence was never empty / it was a filter that made the world bleed molten / Emotional root buried beneath the memory's sentiment/ his thoughts evaporated / the hollow echo of who might've said what in his childhood /

**Dr. Kaya said, "Fury!"**

The Boy puffed his face and ripped his mouth into shape / a performer in despair / a turned protester / yanked the brief case closer, he unsealed it with urgency / the anger seeped through each moving limb as he reached for his next prop / he wrapped the opening of the sock around his two fingers, over and under/ in his grasp, a sock and a frog

A sting slugged through The Boy's veins / Sweat glistened across the ball of his palm and then there was nothing in the fore front / no guards aside no protectors / no chains and no restriction / limitation was the self-desire of rage / The frog burped and fought the cotton cage.

But not any frog / a frog that hummed the ultrasonic click of his childhood houseplants / its skin the colour of Déjà vu / eyes blinked morse code for the soon coming / The sock swung / one, two times / reinvented gravity like a yOyO / around, and / Then/ SLAM on the table/

Emitted a slow glurp / the frog sounded the noise of a forbidden novel closing / and The Boy just watched.

Dr. Kaya's widened eyes and understanding / The Boy knew that fury felt like an entity being stripped from its will, it being hurt and then asked to serve /

The Boy said softly, "Now tell the frog to jump."

He shortly scoffed in arrogance towards Dr. Kaya
He picked up the hurt frog and cradled it.
*i forgive you,* the frog whispered.
“I love you,” The boy said with a kiss on the forehead.
“Remember my yellow, honour it.” The frog sighed into bereavement.

Dr. Kaya wiped the sweat from his neck and itched his knuckles before taking a deep breath. This time he wouldn’t record any progress.
No excuse exists for a man with anger. An angry man uncaught.
The silence pushed him to his next prompt, with clear avoidance.

**Dr. Kaya said, “Joy”**

The Boy sat for a pinched second and envisioned the Word of God in his vanguard. Flipped through the phantom pages, prophets and pilgrims. He found it astonishing how stories revealed as experiences are now saved as factual revelation. Religion was a job to him where attendance was obligatory. His own logic bounced off like sonar with no echo. The study of such an entity ‘God’, seemed tedious.
Like they said, ‘The eternal endeavour.’

A belief with no hypothesis fractured him in ways. He dissected his frontage into sections like a cadaver exam. Snipped here—miracles. Snipped there—virgin births, talking snakes and absolutism. All laid out with pins on the autopsy table.
In his mind all that was once thought of was postmortem.
Nothing twitched. *Quiet.* Except the pin that held down Faith.
It buzzed; it jolted—begged to be let free. The Boy never found comfort in being a follower on the narrow road. Nor deciphered what is true or mythic. The Boy chose to snub the existence of God but conjectured his own.

*Is this all real?*

A burning sensation filled his lungs and tingled his shoulders. He never examined the purpose of joy like this before. To him, *joy was earned only when believing such sentiment existed*. Faith—shaped in a creature—broke loose from the needles and crept through his veins like a rat from the underground. If science explained all cell creation, that should be our brood. On the contrary—what signalled the earliest form of construction? Does this force have a name? The Boy now understood what it meant to be hungry for retorts. God never was a sky ghost nor a rule book.

Dr. Kaya asked," Do you believe in a God?"
The Boy stated, "God was a question you cannot ask without becoming a part of the answer."
Dr. Kaya pried, "That gives you joy?”
The Boy pondered solemnly, "I am alive, I think. Am I not?"

In theory, The Boy believed that if there was a reason for us. We were not mistaken. Mistakes are foolish and six fools couldn’t build a cell. Nevertheless as foolish as our form taking shape from water, rock, fire and the brush of wind.

He stated, "If our launch was done in power. I find joy in the idea of there being someone with a name that cared enough to create us."

The bubbling in his chest painted red, a warm swipe from within. Each bristle poked and tickled against the bone.
Joy felt like swimming in sunbeams.

The Boy noticed stage lights next to the couch—at first staged like décor. He waddled over and plugged them into a port hanging in the openness. *Zap. Whiz*. The electricity buzzed through the room. Milky butter mixed with neon sallow. Sunrays birthed and bounced off the walls. The Boy stretched his hand out and caressed the beams. He twirled his body in the environs. He danced. He performed. And joy baptized him.

Dr. Kaya pried, "Are you dancing with someone?"
"I am just remembering a friend," The Boy said.

There was a silence that clapped through the air.

**Dr. Kaya said, "Love"**

A long pause sat between them as the word marinated.

"If only she was other than a prism of desire. You know," The Boy said.

Refracted fragile hope formed into the parts of who he wanted to be.
There could have been peace. In this case—The Boy didn't want peace.
*What is love?* Arrowed through his dome.
The Boy hovered over the thought.
*How the heart mourned for what it still loved, even when it was just for a fraction of time.*

The shadow in every crowded place carved the longing into his breath. In his mind—*she is both storm and soft refrain; a wild tide that once swept him ashore and a quiet ache that ran under his skin still.* He never stopped replaying the half-spoken promises, the almost' that became maybe until his own voice faded into regret. And so he waited—not for her return, but for the moment when he can forgive himself for loving her too late. For knowing that she was never simply someone.

"She smelled like sleep, like the hour before morning," The Boy croaked.

The Boy believed that love was the lab of the heart. Where the cocktail of chemicals met within buildings of emotional architecture. Cultural codes, and if true—it breaks through silence. The Boy mapped every flicker in his mind, bits of her. It matched the static in the room and the quiet. He counted her footsteps that synced with his heart thump. He traced the sound of her laugh on the back of his palms, until his fingertips took the shape of her body. The shape of worn out piano keys he never got to play.
A half-remembered melody.
"Love is yearning," The Boy shivered silently.

To The Boy, *he knew love when his chest broke under the weight of her name*. He knew when he looked around the room and saw her with a different face. He knew love when he heard someone pray. It was love that ached his wrists when he wrote about her. It was love, because he was in pain.

He counted up to two-fifty footsteps when his heart sank. *She was near*, he recognised her sound. The Boy got up and drifted through the cold and naked hallways embedded in the room. Each step matched with the ghost's stomp. He walked faster. When he heard her around the corner his mouth started to wet. So familiar, so close.

Running now—he turned, left, right. Then faster.
Losing breath, The Boy lost traction below his sole.
He missed the corner.
His head plummeted over his heels and pinned into the wall.
The race of love now ended. He looked up at the hot white light above.
No mask. Just one tear.
The stamp of being in love.

"Dr. Kaya," The Boy whispered.
"Yes," he replied.
"Love is what remains, when I cannot die properly," The Boy stated.
"I would rather be killed—for I remember her too often," his last words faded.

Dr. Kaya croaked into his mic, "Emotional flood, transference complete—I can't…"

Dr. Kaya wept.

Dr. Kaya switched the recording button upside-down, and the *fizz* swirled around them.
Deleted all evidence of psychological progression.
Such authority opposed emotional connection.
A glitch pushed The Boy to the other side of the door again.
The present greets.

Clunk.
Clunk.
Clunk.
Clunk.
Clunk.

My breath releases from my chest.
My spirit leaves my forefront.
I have settled within myself again.
My eyes peer open and the metal slips through sweat under my palm.

I have not moved.
I turn to the figure sitting near me. I look at the Counting Lady for the last time.
She is the only one doing her job here.

"Don't be afraid 001, in the age of information, the choice is yours,"
she reminds me.

If this was in my control.
The therapy session would go that way.
I probably wouldn't have to be here to vote, nor have a choice.

But, who knows—maybe I can face this?

I look at the boxes displayed now closer to me, like they had feet.
They had teeth.

I wonder about what I would tell my mother after this.

"Every. Good. Citizen. Adds. To. The. Strength. Of. A Nation!"
"Every. Good. Citizen. Adds. To. The. Strength. Of. A Nation!"
"Every. Good. Citizen. Adds. To. The. Strength. Of. A Nation!"
They scream at me.

*My name blinks above me.*
*Archive: 001.*

I am summoned again, by a deeper warmer breath.
It is now my turn to go in.

*“Man is condemned to be free.”*

*-Jean-Paul Sartre*

# AFTER HOURS

Hannah Ballaram

There are no questions in the bright-lit, soft sterile. Preliminary directives remain printed on the walls and shining from screens like infinite reflections of something thoughtless, unfound, yet clear-cut. Your hands will do the familiar exercise, flitting back and forth along a practised pattern.

LIIVEN Corp exists as a world of its own. Unoriginal, understimulating, *logic-lash* nothing to do all day in a company of companies who enjoy the pleasure and company of those uniform, those moldable, that teetering structure of ones central person the temptation of these likeness creatures, the form of their world contrived and constricting on the neck, the feet, the mind. It keeps your back straight, your shirt white.

A message pulses bright blue on my display.

Here, all form and order, any occasion to exit one's cubicle spells hope for waiters—workers. The fax machine hacks up  a task - "SECURITY MANAGEMENT" printed large over a stack of papers I'm not meant to see. Everything slides into a manilla folder, blinding yellow, and is tucked under my arm.

My bones shiver and pop as I stand, tingling with ages of unused.

I cross the squared off stasis to a set of steel doors that reveal an escalator beginning to move the second I step on. Going up amongst the abyssal echo beneath me, silence comes alive. Anyone granted the opportunity would be entranced by the vacuous, seemingly endless stretch of up and down.

I suppose no one knows they want to move till they are told to.

The trip is long and unmapped, straight up in a forever diagonal. Just out of arms reach, a down-going escalator presents a  tall, powder-skinned figure with an even taller top hat. It's running against the slope, pawing the rails in a desperate attempt to climb, conquer the opposite flowing stream.

"You're going the wrong way!" I stupidly call. The figure is frantic, sweating and splitting at the seams with effort to get to the top. I stand in place, going just as fast. Then, yelling at the top if its head:

"On the way! The auditor is expecting!"

"Expecting what?" I flounder,

"The auditor is on the way!"

On the way to where, I think to myself, gripping the handrail, glaring at the tall, powder-skinned figure in wonder. It's wound up in knots, chattering and squirming on the spot, growing taller in stressed lines till it seems to disappear entirely.

Soon, I arrive.

Steel slides sideways and reveals a low-lit platform of a vision I know all too well. Grey carpet, lined seats, uncomfortable postures on the hard plastic backs. And evidently, a liquid floor.

My knees wobble like an elephant on stilts. For an experienced walker - worker, I labour to reach cross the length that these others seem to master. They are perfectly still in their crumpled forms as the carpet swims below them. A disembodied voice calls out numbers no one seems to claim. Then, lighting up the ceiling:

"904, Velile."

Every head turns my way, suddenly assessing me. I stagger and walk briskly, aiming for the front desk. Their eyes mark my back like targets. Glowing blacklight, the reptilian slits fix and slither up and after me, after my name, my station, my life—

I land on the desk, panting, looking in fervent desperation for everything I've made of myself. And no one has moved an inch - stuck staring, submerged in carpet.

The receptionist coughs beside me and I straighten, polite as can be in my lingering terror. The creature is a bright skinned beauty with a plastered-on smile, eyes so thin they might as well be inked lines on its face. Behind its skeletal profile stand long and wide cabinets, stretching upward and outward forever, vanishing into another swimming, grey haze.

"Your reason?"

I swallow a dull taste in my throat, my hands adjusting to reveal the yellow folder.

"Uh, delivery. This," I scowl, clearly lost and unsettled. The smile eyed-wonder takes the folder with warm *welcompliance*, flipping it over, tucking the edges into place, never looking inside. It receives a large red stamp "URGENT" on the front before I get it back.

My body moves toward the next door, steering across the rolling carpet carefully this time.

I pass through the door into  a nearly identical room. The tightness at my neck and doek over my head gives me pause to look down, find myself in a stiff blue tunic, parachuting at my ankles. Crocs and rubber gloves, rolled up sleeves and a broom in hand. My head snaps to my blurry reflection in a glass wall, confirming the cleaners garb.

"Join the rest, come along, along, along!" A portly voice shouts. Pushing me, the man in a pinstripe suit begins pushing me, the desk worker now cleaner into another crowd of woman cleaners across the cubicled room.

"You'll notice," declares the portly man. "I've taken the liberty of demonstrating optimal surface engagement!" He brandishes a vacuum in front of us. "Now, in the spirit of

collaborative momentum, you'll each be issued a broom. Yes, a broom, my fellow man! The objective is simple: maintain the carpet at the standard just displayed."

The rest of the girls look around and spring into action, sweeping dusty carpet in wide circles. The portly man in the pinstripe suit chortles and swipes his vacuum over the carpet, mimicking the motion. He catches my stillness quickly and knocks the end of his device on mine.

"My dear, that's no way to go about your tasks."

Blubbering, setting my broom aside, I answer him: "I have a task, I need to get back to it. Where have I placed the folder?…" I trail off, searching the floor. The swept up dust collects into clouds at my ankles, lifting to my nose. ACHOO! ACHOO!

"*Qaphela*, girl! You'll upset the poor lad!" exclaims the portly man in the pinstripe suit. The vacuum - he's talking about the vacuum! It bursts from his grip, barking and zooming after me. The girls carry on as normal while I spin the room in circles, evading the vicious mechanical devil.

"Take it! Take the broom!" The portly man yells, red in the face and looking more piggish by the second. I slide for the broom handle and turn it on the offending vacuum, whacking off its course.

"*Islima*! You imbecile! *Ukushaya mfana wami*!"

The vacuum squeals and smokes, tipping to the side and powering down. The portly man rushes to console his darling, which seems to alert the other girls. Similarly offended, they break formation and charge after me.

I whip around and break for the door.

Behind me the portly man wails then dissolves into coughing fits, swept-up dust rattling his round chest. The floor seems to swim again and my shoes weigh like bricks as I clamber on. The collar of my uniform strangles each breath. More feet pound the carpet, more furious sweeping in my direction.

In their final betrayal, my uniform trips me.

I hit the hard floor. The ringing in my head stretches longer than I can count, but I'm getting used to breathing in scraps. I force myself upright, meeting the soft *brr* and hum of machinery again - escalators, new. They follow the same upward course and in the far shining distance, converge into one.

A white top hat catches my attention.

This time, it slips forward and sideways and the tall powder-skinned figure tips it back in place.

"42," The tall powder-skinned figure mutters. Taps their fingers to each other in a *timepress*. "43, 44, 45…"

I join the adjacent escalator, skipping steps to stop at their side. "It's you from earlier," I say, a hint of satisfaction in my words.

The tall powder-skinned figure flinches, head whipping around, fingers twitching off pattern suddenly. "You shouldn't shout." They glance upward, then back down, then upward again.

"We're going the same way," I frown, joining them in the search of random things. They fix their beady red eyes to me.

"I have the auditor. The auditor, he…" They flip their left wrist, glaring at the watch face on the inner side. The other hand, fisting a black folio, frees a finger to tug at their collar. The escalators draw closer to each other and the end.

"1, 2, 3, 4…"

"I have, er, this for the top floor," I look down, finding the yellow folder in the big front pocket of my tunic. I present it to the tall powder-skinned figure, and they stare at it like it might explode.

"You don't need that. You don't mean that. You- You-…"

"15, 16, 17, 18, nine-..! Nine," The tall powder-skinned figure rambles, tugging their collar, tapping the watch face, desperately trying to get back on track. I catch their top hat before it tips forward and over the rails.

"Not now," I shake my head and glance at the shining distance. Now is the in-between. Now is where we can be still, where there are no auditors and heads to answer to. This realization seems to calm the powder-skinned figure and I dare see a softness in their red eyes.

"Later," They agree. The escalators climb toward the blinding sheet of light. We drift closer. My heart jumps to my throat, forcing my mouth open to say something, ask a single other question before we part.

"Why were you running earlier?"

The tall powder-skinned figure retracts, looking through me. "*Why'cause*, I's cou- I could get ahead without the- the time. Oh, the time. The auditor will be expecting."

The landing approaches the figure before me, their head whipping around, fingers twitching to count again. My body freezes over. They start talking too fast for their own breath.

"They want— eat! On the out and  in-between! Don't stay, He's expecting!"

Then they're gone.

I release a breath I didn't know I was holding. Somehow, my moving slow made the tall powder-skinned figure arrive sooner to the landing and leave before me. I climb the rest of the way, pushing myself up against the handrails. If I could be fast enough, I could join them and help with the auditor, forget the file.

The door slides open to a room, quiet and perfectly confined.

Its central oddity is the shape of it, long and triangular, lined with cubicle rows that make it impossible to see which way to the pyramid head.  At centre of the shrubbery, in a clearing, a figure wearing a sad blue suit hunches over a small table. One so small it could be a tall bar stool. One just so large enough to seat a chessboard on which the figure plays and deliberates. Their fingers hover above the pieces, twitching, circling.

"*Hhhay-ch* fourrr," they murmur, rolling the move aggressively. "No, no, no. Too eager. Always too eager."

They nudge the piece back. Then forward again. Then back. They haven't looked at me. "Your move," they say, louder now, as if announcing to a crowd. I fold up my arms like a petulant child.

"I'm not playing."

"Mm." They grunt. Still don't respect me with a glance. I start to wish they wore a top hat that I could swat off their head. "Then you are losing."

They tap the board twice. "Who are you?" they ask, still staring down.

My jaw tightens, locking the words in my mouth. The sad blue suit shifts.

"Who arrrre you," they repeat, dragging it out this time, like a teacher introducing the alphabet to a child.

"I have somewhere to be," I cede, narrowing my eyes at the surrounding cubicle rows. How will I find the door again? Sad blue suit doesn't signal 'promising guide.'

"Everywhere is somewhere," they mutter. "Knight to *fh*-ive. Brave. *Styoo*-pid, but brrrave."

My eyes drop. The board isn’t a board. It's mine - all yellow and stamped with red, topped with black and white chess pieces. I step right up to sad blue suit's side, my hands now fists.

“That's my file."

“It’s a surface,” they snap from their *thinktrap*. This time, I get a glare, wide-eyed and pompous. “Surfaces are for use.”

“That’s not what it’s for."

They smooth the page with both hands, slow, deliberate, like calming it.

“Everything here is *functual*,” they say. “Even you. And who arrre you?.”

I reach for it. Their hand slams down over mine.

“Don’t.”

They lean back slightly, studying the board again, already bored of me.

“Knight or bishop,” they say, louder now. “Decide. Quickly. I don’t have all day to waste on indecision.”

“I don’t care.”

They freeze, then guffaw at the board, at me. “Doesn’t carrrre,” they repeat, mocking my thoughts. “Then what a luxurrry.”

I make for the file again, ready to tip the game. Sad blue suit snatches up my hand, forcing it to hover above the pieces.

“Knight or bishop,” they insist, twisting my wrist. “You must see it. It’s obvious. It’s always obvious.”

My muscles burn trying to pull away. The heavy shoes of this uniform grant me a stable ground, but its like wrenching welded metal apart. “I said I don’t—”

“THEN WHAT ARE YOU.”

The air compresses, slams into my chest like a shove. I stagger back, heels catching. The table rattles. Pieces scatter across the yellow file. They're on their feet now, not wild, just furious at the effort of me.

“You stand there,” they spit, scowl cracking at the edges like there's a worse expression to hide. “like you’re not able to advance.”

The pressure crushes my chest. “Move,” they say, quieter now, but heavier. “Or be moved.”

The clearing widens in a trice. Chess is forgotten, swung to the swimming floor. The closer the sad blue suit gets, the heavier I feel to my right side, left, forward and back. The room seems to tilt, the figure largens. The next breath—

The next room. Complete with a stupidly tall order of furniture uselessly placed in geometric curves and colours, smooth and soft but firm enough to sit for as long as the break hour. The room is too bright; too meticulously crafted to make you pause at the various amenities before you leave.

I swing my heavy shoes around the legs of tables, chairs, low stools, sifting to get through the room.

I make the mistake of looking up. Women sit along a curved counter, identical posture, identical smiles. Cocktail glasses in hand holding water and large ice. They turn with the synchronicity of trained birds, lighting up in floral dresses and made-up hair.

"Look at you, poor thing. Why don't you take a seat?" one flower says.

I don't move closer. In fact I trudge forward again, focusing on the door at the opposite end. "I'm fine."

The air falls silent, like they aren't used to rejection.

Another flower tilts her petalled head. "You don't look fine."

This time I look down at myself, then up at the women. My cleaners tunic is quite the contrast to their silken skirts and corsets. I turn my nose up anyway, patting the yellow file now safely in the front sleeve of my tunic. "I didn't ask."

"Sit," a third blossom insists, smiling tighter, patting the stool beside her. "You'll feel better once you settle."

"Settle into what?"

"Into something appropriate," she remarks, glancing over my uniform.

I let out a breath of a laugh. "Right." I step closer anyway, feeling for a less cluttered path to the door. Up close, the same-face syndrome is worse. Same makeup. Same expression. Same dark stillness in place of pupils.

"You all practice this?" I ask. "Or does it just happen?"

Then, softly, "We fit."

I give their cinched clothes a once-over. "That's nice."

“And you don’t,” a fuchsia coloured woman remarks. Her pointed nails scrape her cocktail glass. They shift now. Subtle, but coordinated.

“Why are you here?” one asks.

I shrug, eyes drifting to the door again. “Wrong turn. Still finding my way.”

“You shouldn’t be here,” one says. “It’s unpleasant to watch.”

My nostrils flare. As if I'm not trying hard enough to leave. “Then don’t.”

The first glass flies. It shatters near my feet, water splashing up my legs. I flinch, but my foot gets caught under a low sofa and I tumble over the cushions.

"Leave!” another glass, sharper, closer. Pure crystal, I bet, and almost slicing through my uniform.

“What do you think I'm trying to do?!" I snap, helping myself up, winding around the clutter again. My tone doesn't help the situation, and more glass flies past my head. The women claw closer, pulling, pushing, tearing like a vicious wake of vultures.

“Fix yourself!” one spits. I shove them off me and hear a powerful rip through my tunic. I gather up the yellow file under my arm and work my elbows into their eye sockets. They screech like banshees, scratching and grabbing at me.

Suddenly there's a powerful shove that knocks me to the floor. The room tilts. Brightness flares behind my eyes. My head crashes against something, and I'm swallowed by darkness.

By now the *stair-state* between rooms is known, predictable. I set my eyes high in a tired sort of hope, finding my feet, then the nearest escalator. This time, I can find solace in a familiar face further up, across from me. The escalator carries me upward in a slow, mechanical glide, its hum steady enough to dull the edge of my thoughts. I allow myself to be carried, eyes scanning the levels above.

Then I see it. *Them*.

The tall powder-skinned figure. The top hat, slightly tilted forward. Long fingers tapping in uneven rhythm against the rail.

“41, 42, 43—”

The sound settles something in my chest before I can stop it. Not comfort, exactly, but recognition.

“There you are,” I say, stepping closer as the parallel escalators draw near.

The figure continues counting, level, postured, staring straight ahead.

“44, 45, 46...”

I watch more carefully now, my eyes narrowing as the distance between us closes. The hat does not slip. The shoulders are not straining. The breath is not laboured. There is no frantic urgency clawing through the figure’s movements like before.

“You’re not running,” I say.

The figure turns their head slowly, as if the motion has been considered in advance. When they face me fully, the expression that meets me is not panic,  not even recognition. It's a smile, stretching wide and smooth. Held in place like it has been plastered-on.

“Running is inefficient,” they reply.

I feel the offset immediately, a quiet misalignment that settles under my skin.

“Since when?” I ask.

The smile deepens, though the rest of the face remains perfectly still. “Since it became unnecessary.”

Something tightens in my chest. Not fear. Not quite. Something closer to irritation. “That’s not how you talk,” I insist.

The figure tilts their head slightly, the top hat perfectly still.

“No,” they agree lightly. “It isn’t.”

I suck in a sharp breath, gripping the railing tightly. The tall powder-skinned figure morphs disgustingly, changing colour and shape like moulded clay. In their place, the smile-eyed wonder stands, eyes so thin they might as well be inked lines on its face.

I exhale through my nose, a short, humourless sound. “Right.”

The escalator continues its climb, drawing them level for only a moment before the gap widens again. Out of its disguise, the smile-eyed wonder happily continues counting under their breath in a sing-song tone.

“So where are they?” I ask, facing forward with little interest.

“The auditor planned for flexibility,” they shrug. “Roles may be adapted.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

“No,” they say again. “It isn’t.”

The light above grows brighter, flattening the edges of everything, turning the space into something indistinct and overly clean. I inspect the smile eyed wonder and the answer settles without needing to be spoken.

The wonder watches me again, opening their wide mouth maybe to offer a consolation.

“You can still make it,” they add, as if offering something generous. “Provided the compliance protocol is met.”

I let out a small, disbelieving laugh. “You really think that means anything here?”

“It is the *thing*,” they reply. "The very thing, 904, that maintains your smile."

The escalator reaches the top.

I step off without waiting, without looking back. My aimlessness brings me through another entryway. One moment I'm moving, carried forward by irritation more than intention, and the next I'm standing inside a room that feels immediately, unmistakably well-known.

My exact floor, the most dear maze of desk corners paired with their fax and print machines, right before me.

This is the sameness LIIVEN Corp so treasures and is made of.  Every seat occupied, every anonymous head of the family is bent. Pens move in quiet synchrony. Screens glow with a dull, uniform light. The sound is not silence, but something close to it. The soft friction of work being done without question.

I march myself down an unmarked path through the room, unknowingly tracking the way to my desk. That is, it's supposed to be my desk. The square space expands to a larger, private corner office - a wide mahogany work-desk, slim and silent stationary stacked along the sides, notepad, telephone, the whole collection of upper management supplies.

And, precisely, The Man With Yellow Eyes.

He is already looking at me. Fingers weaved over his mouth - no doubt hiding a stern frown - elbows resting on the padded edge of his desk, made for such posture.

“You’ve caused a disturbance,” he says. His voice is calm, measured, as if the claim has already been confirmed elsewhere and this is merely a formality.

I exhale, something dry and tired edging into the sound. My back straightens anyway, my hands fold over at my front. “I've been trying to get through to you, sir.”

A few heads lift. Then a few more. By now I'm the object of everyone's eyes - the portly man in the pinstriped suit hugging his quivering vacuum, his workers, the flowers, looking more undone than ever from our skirmish, sad blue suit, trying to arrange chess pieces on

the corner of the desk, and even the smile eyed wonder, hovering over The Man With Yellow Eye's shoulder like an angelic devil. The movement spreads slowly, deliberately, until the room's agitation gathers around me in quiet, collective focus.

"You've been more than trying. You have been altering course, and ruining theirs," The Man With Yellow Eyes says, reaching down to the desk before him.

My file.

My head snaps down to my tunic, only that its not my tunic, and I'm returned to the bouse and skirt I arrived in.

The Man With Yellow Eyes opens the file, turns a page with careful precision. I strain my neck and stretch my toes to see what he's reading, the writing I failed to learn but knew I had to deliver. His gaze scans the contents as if reading something of significance rather than… empty pages.

"Non-compliant," he reads. "Disruptive presence. Failure to integrate."

I step forward, my hands curled into fists. "That's not true."

"It is recorded."

"I didn't write that."

"No," The Man says, finally looking up at me. "You made it."

A murmur moves through the room, low and contained, like agreement settling into place. The portly man glares at me, they all do, giving reason to the records with their grievances.

"She damaged company equipment!" He insists.

"She disrupted crucial decision-making operations!" Sad blue suit snaps.

"She violently assaulted us!" A fuming flower accuses, holding out her ripped hem and chipped nails.

"You attacked me first!" I exclaim, my throat clogged with bile and exasperation. "And you forced me to clean for you! And you interrogated me when I was just passing through!"

"And you—" I find the smile eyed wonder, eyebrows piqued with interest. "You tricked me! You said I could make it!"

The smile eyed wonder seems to twitch out of focus, gently disappointed.
"I'm afraid you made the wrong course your way…"

"And what way is that? There's no way but up!"

"ENOUGH." The Man With Yellow Eyes comes down like a strike of lightning on us all, silencing our complaints.

“You are always given a path. The quickest and easiest way, in fact. Instead, you chose to offend every written order LIIVEN Corp instils to protect its person,” he asserts. "What to do with you…"

The room stills.

"We should have a vote," the portly man suggests.

"We should have a free for all," the flowers press.

"Can we break for coffee first?" The smile eyed wonder offers. The words pass through the room like a signal.

I move before they can, tearing the file from The Man's desk.

It resist for a second before giving way, the first rip powering me through the next, the next, the next. Paper splits, tatters, falls in uneven, pieces to the floor at my feet.

I look down at the pages, the naked white reflecting back.

The room erupts. A gavel sounds somewhere, and chairs tip to the ground, feet pound the floor toward me.

“Remove her! The nerve!”

“You dunce! You imbecile! Stain of the world!”

Hands grab at my arms, my shoulders, but my practice round with the flowers prepared me for this. I twist free, shoving past them with more force than I thought I had left.

I turn and run, kicking off my heeled pumps and cardigan to move faster. Through the rows, past the desks. The room blurring at the edges as I push forward. The corridor opens ahead of me, long and sloping.

And there—

A flash of white. The tall figure. The top hat. Moving quickly, already ahead.

All the company clamber after me, but this is real.

I don't hesitate following the white shadow, the ticking watch still counting the seconds down for the auditors arrival.

The building seeming to stretch and fold around me, distances shifting, spaces repeating, but the tall powder-skinned figure remains just ahead, just out of reach.

“Wait!” I stupidly call.

The doors at the end burst open, light flooding through in a way that feels different from the artificial brightness inside. Less controlled, less contained, less tasteless and sick. The figure slips through, a full-bodied turn ahead.

I reach the threshold a moment later, heart hammering in my ears. Before me, the space opens. Behind me, the noise builds again, the office reassembling itself, the order of pleasant company surging forward to reclaim what slipped out of place.

There is no wait any longer; only now.

Somewhere inside, the escalators keep moving upward.

*The hand that strikes the child, did not begin with the teacher.*

# Soft Backs where wolves Once Stood

Lwandile Ngidi

KWELUSA HIGH SCHOOL

WHERE SHEEP GATHER AND GROW

# NATIONAL SENIOR RECORD

GRADE 12

## MATHEMATICS P2

SEPTEMBER 2025

MARKS: 150

TIME: 3 HOURS

| STUDENT CODE | 10841996 |
|---|---|

This question paper consist of 9 pages and 1 information sheet.

***INSTRUCTIONS AND INFORMATION***

***Read the following instructions carefully before answering the questions.***

1. This question paper consists of 9 pages and one repeated.
2. Answer ALL questions, you have one.
3. Number the answers correctly according to the numbering system used in this question paper.
4. Clearly show ALL calculations, diagrams, graphs, etc., which you have used in determining your answers. Each diagram shows the workings of what happens when you multiply one generation by the next.
5. Answers only will NOT necessarily be awarded full marks. (You must show how you arrived there).
6. You may use an approved scientific calculator (non-programmable and non-graphical), unless stated otherwise (You may calculate your way through this).
7. If necessary, round off answers correct to TWO decimal places, unless stated otherwise, but something isn't rounded off.
8. Diagrams are NOT necessarily drawn to scale, some diagrams exceed the margins.
9. Write neatly and legibly. He could not.

QUESTION 1:

A sociological research team conducted a neutral, nationwide survey of 500 South African households to understand the primary disciplinary methods used for teenagers. The data was stratified by the age group of the teenagers and is presented in the contingency table below.

Table 1:

| ***Method*** | ***13 -15*** | ***16 - 18*** | ***Total*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Verbal | 80 | 120 | 200 |
| Loss of privileges | 90 | 110 | 200 |
| Corporal Punishment | 70 | 30 | 100 |
| ***Total*** | 240 | 260 | ***500*** |

1.1. Calculate the probability that a randomly selected ***teenager*** from this survey is ***primarily disciplined using corporal punishment***. (1)

1.2. Determine the probability that a teenager is in the 13–15 age group AND is disciplined through the loss of privileges (2).

1.3. Given that a randomly selected teenager is in the 16–18 age group, what is the probability that their household uses corporal punishment? (2)

1.4. Let **A** be the event "A teenager is 13–15 years old" and **B** be the event "The primary disciplinary method is corporal punishment". (3)

1.5. Comment on the general trend regarding the use of physical discipline as teenagers get older. Show all working. (5)

**TOTAL: 13**

1.5. Comment on the general trend regarding the use of physical discipline as teenagers get older.
Show all working (5).

$P(A) \times P(B) = (240/500) \times (100/500)$

$0,48 \times 0,2 = 0,096$

$0,11538...$

Dependent.

~~splitting the air. then~~
~~not for him, but for~~
~~tion...whose... people are~~
~~splitting the air. then~~
~~not for him, but for~~
~~tion...whose... people are~~

sharp splitting the air. then
nched not for him, but for
the nation...whose... people are
blow.

1.5 comment on the general trend regarding the use of physical discipline as teenagers get older. Show all working.(5)

$P(A) \times P(B) = (240/500) \times (100/500)$
$P(A) \times P(B) = (240/500) \times (100/500)$

sharp splitting the air. then
nched not for him, but for
the nation...whose... people are
blow.

$0,48 \times 0,2 = 0,096$
$0,48 \times 0,2 = 0,096$
$0,11538...$
$0,11538...$

Dependent.
Dependent.

~~g the air. then~~
~~for him, but for~~
~~hose... people are~~
~~g the air. then~~
~~or him, but for~~
~~ose... people are~~

~~tting the air. then~~
~~for him, but for~~
~~...whose... people are~~
~~tting the air. then~~
~~for him, but for~~
~~...whose... people are~~

st, sharp splitting the air. then
flinched not for him, but for
ty the nation...whose... people are
wet blow.

The first crack ca
another,splitting his
us,terrified of the
sheep."escaped betwee

~~The first crac~~
~~another,splitting~~
~~us,terrified of~~
~~sheep."escaped b~~

The first c
another,splittin
us,terrified o
sheep."escapee
~~The first c~~
~~another,splittin~~
~~us,terrified o~~
~~sheep."escapee~~

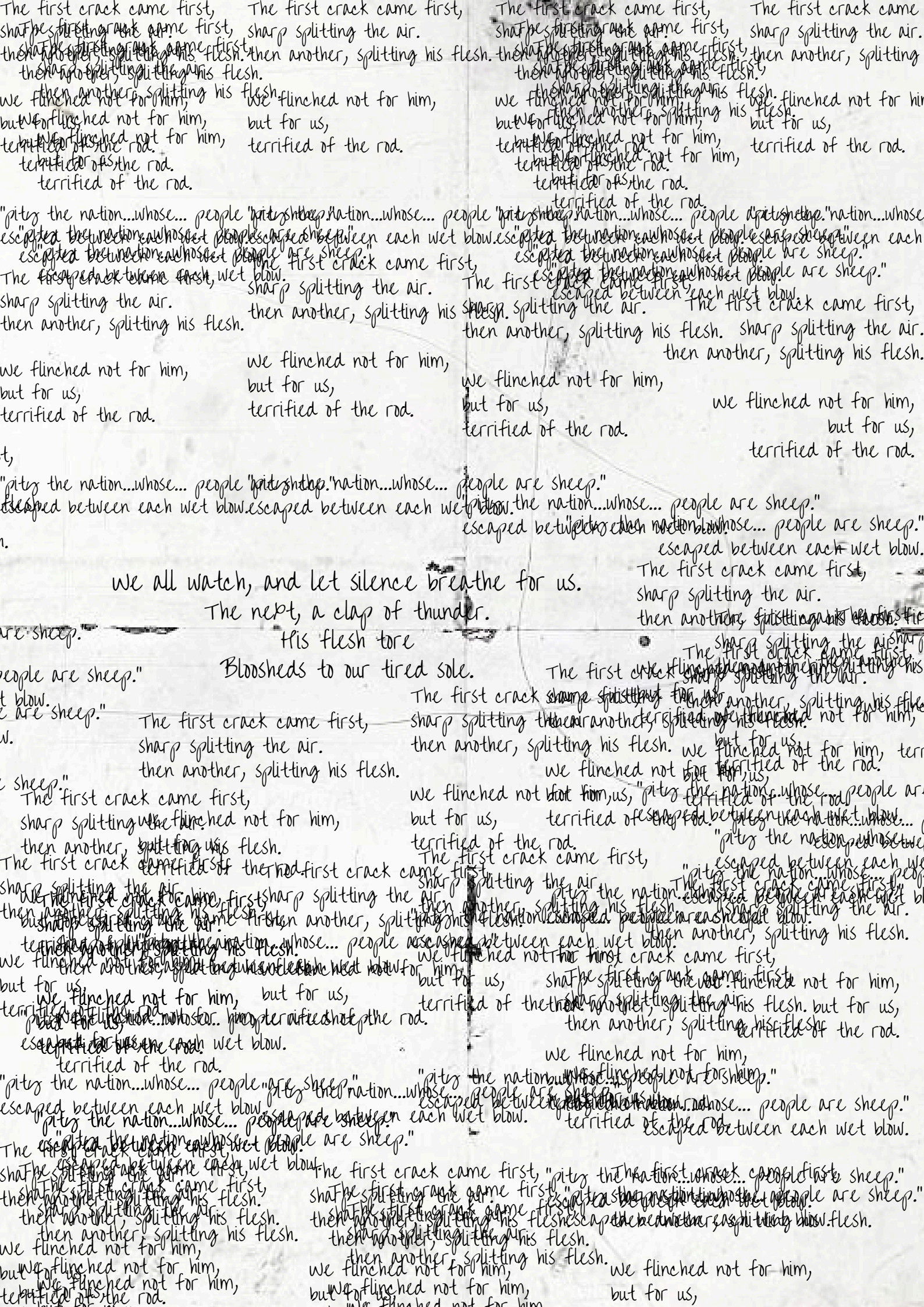
tting the air. then
for him, but for
...whose... people are
~~tting the air. then~~
~~for him, but for~~
~~...whose... people are~~
~~tting the air. then~~
~~for him, but for~~
~~...whose... people are~~

Please turn over

The first crack.
He drops to the floor.

His icy glare drags upward, breath wheezes in his throat.
“Piiiiity”

Please turn over



we all watch, and let silence breathe for us.
The next, a clap of thunder.
His flesh tore
Bloosheds to our tired sole.

Show all working (5).

A surge of bile - reflux.
But my breath lunges forward, my spirit grips the rod
My soul takes them all.

"Piiiiit-t-t-t-t-t-ty."
this word, a mix of blood and saliva.
Struck, split, crack, smash!
Every bone a bell, a tremble with each blow.

this bleats awful; echo from the corner he makes himself small in.
He presses his lips together,
silence listens.
A long exhale of breath from his chest,
moves around the room and settles in me.

The rod not grown from this soil.
It crossed oceans,
in stiff wooden ships,
packed between bibles and ledgers.
When it hit the dirt, names were taken first
men with grey beards turned into boys.
"boys" to abusers - shepherds of pain in their homes.
from ships, to fields, to mines,
to homes, and now classrooms
The tool has changed it's shape,
but when it falls,
history repeats itself without asking why.

END.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Mandulo* was not shaped by me alone, but by the hearts and creativity of those who poured into it alongside me. My deepest gratitude goes to my first year tutor, along with my classmates Lwandile Ngidi, Hannah Ballaram, Savannah-Lee Jacobs, and my HOP Nomthandazo Nxabela, whose support, insight, and guidance helped this story grow into what it is today. Inspired by the work of *Wonder Buhl*e and the spirit of the *Shaka iLembe* soundtrack, *Mandulo* became a journey of returning to the self, to one's roots, identity, and truth. This is the season. This is the time. Who are you before the world defined you?

—Noeleen Nyoni, *Mandulo*

Vir die voorreg, Dankie Jesus. To Mamma and Pappa, for making my dream come true.
To Ouma—the oil from an olive tree I wish to sit under and pen to. To Xavier, my something blue.
To a forever friendship, and my moon, for making me try again.
To every version of me, and to walking each other home.
And to the Arts—I belong to you.

—Savannah-Lee Jacobs, *Phantasmagoria*

Some things are too heavy to carry alone, and some things are too important not to try. *Soft Backs Where Wolves Once Stood* sits between both truths.
To my fellow writers—Hannah, Noeleen and Savannah. Thank you for walking this cobblestone kind of journey barefoot with me, it became a lot easier knowing the people beside me were writing with just as much honesty and care.
To Aphiwe, my older sister—you have always been the first place I bring things I cannot explain. *Soft Backs Where Wolves Once Stood* began as one of those things. Thank you for making space for it, and me.

—Lwandile Ngidi, *Soft Backs Where Wolves Once Stood*

To the moon and low tide, for tending to my hopes, fears, and dreams.
To Luca the stray and Zack the lost, for lending a cuddle in colder nights. Thank you.
To my friends and fellow writers, grounding and kind, I wish you every success.
My oldest friend Jamie H. Carelse, who kept in touch and promised to take revenge with me, I will thank you soon in person.

—Hannah Q.I. Ballaram, *AFTER HOURS*

# ABOUT 4THWALLCOLLECTIVE

4thWall is a collective of writers committed to challenging and dismantling normalized systems, beliefs, and structures that negatively impact individuals and society as a whole. Through storytelling, poetry, and creative expression, we aim to question the status quo, amplify overlooked voices, and inspire critical thought and meaningful change. As writers, our mission is to create work that not only reflects the realities people face, but also encourages dialogue, awareness, and transformation beyond the wall of passive observation.

—Noeleen Nyoni, *Social Media Manager*

To me the 4thwall is exposure to the unsaid. We do not have the same experience, but we are all in the same boat, drifting through the same in-between, asking the same kinds of questions about the reality of living after the rainbow, That, to me, is the point and The Undershade is where we begin, but the wall was always meant to come down.

—Lwandile Ngidi, *Project Manager*

I remember the birth of the collective and what she looked like the morning after. A group of 4 that wanted the same thing: pretty catharsis. In the same wind, we listened and made space for the unfinished parts of you and me. As we travel South Africa, talk about her and hear her out. We promise to keep you and the people safe.

—Savannah-Lee Jacobs, *Graphic Designer*

4thWall is a long, ongoing conversation between its members and the audience. We write for ourselves, yet we write for you. My hopes, desires, and fears are closer to yours than previously thought. Its about realizing the inherent artistic connection between writer and reader, and bridging the gap: the more you know us, the more you know yourselves, the safer and more hopeful the future of the youth becomes.

—Hannah Q.I. Ballaram, Editor & Curator

See more at: https://4thwallcollective.neocities.org
Instagram: @4thwall_collective
Tiktok: 4thWall_Collective

# The Undershade

You begin in the past you forgot,

seeing the future of your person.

us / not we / art.

i forgive you.

And the child within you —

the one who learnt to flinch.

Empty forever,

upward, downward,

parting across—

What is the answer to madness

in place of being?

Discover self that has been shrouded...